

THE CONTRIBUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

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INTRODUCTION

In collaboration with the University of the South Pacific(USP), the National Institute of Multimedia Education of the Ministry of Education, Japan(NIME) conducted research in 1991 on the life-style and attitudes of students learning through the distance education program provided by the Extension Services of USP. This presentation is based on the preliminary findings of this research which was made possible by kind cooperation extended by our counterpart researcher, Ms. Ruby Va'a. She was not able to participate in the symposium, but, taking this opportunity, we would like to express our most sincere gratitude to her and other staff of the USP Extension Services.

AN OVERVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Despite the serious impact that Japan brought to countries in the South Pacific Region during the last war, most Japanese, especially younger generations born in the Postwar era do not seem to be aware that Japan could be a potential factor in the development of higher education in the South Pacific countries which will be discussed in this presentation. It seems that such a negative view of the Japanese potential is further reinforced by the intimate relationships between the Pacific island countries and their former suzerain countries maintained even today.

In fact, these suzerain countries especially "British" countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom still keep a strong influence upon the higher education of the Pacific island countries. The higher education systems among the Pacific countries are

still affected by their suzerain countries, and the magnitude of roles played by the suzerain countries in terms of human resource development -- for instance, the acceptance of young islanders as international students into their universities -- is significant.

The foundation of the University of the South Pacific (USP) brought about a significant impact in that it has changed to a great extent such a traditional situation.

USP is the only regional university in the South Pacific, consisting of 13 member island countries. USP has the characteristics of a regional institution among the South Pacific countries. This regional institution was established in 1970 by 11 island countries: The Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, The Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Western Samoa. In 1991 the Marshall Islands also joined USP as the 13th member. The main campus is located at Laukala in Suva, the capital of the Republic of Fiji, and the second campus for the Department of Agronomy is at Alafua in Western Samoa. For students studying through the USP Extension Program, ten regional centres are established near the capital cities of the ten member countries except for Tokelau.

By establishing USP the Pacific island countries could possess their own higher education institution for the first time for their history. It can be said that this dramatic change was even more facilitated by the beginning of the USP Extension Services.

The Extension Services started their mission in 1970 by the provision of a Diploma course in primary education with primary/secondary school teachers as a correspondence course of the Department of Education. In 1974 it became an independent organization of USP. Today USP Extension Services operate their own satellite tutorial program through a commercial satellite network. This is well known internationally as a model of satellite-based education.

We would like to discuss how and in what ways USP as the only regional higher education institution is functioning in terms of the socio-economic development of the whole Pacific Region.

In order to fulfill various needs for higher education in Asia and the Pacific, not only USP but many higher education institutions have been established and are actively providing educational opportunities. These attempts include open universities and distance learning programs using new telecommunication technologies such as satellite communication, computer communication, and so on.

OBJECTIVES AND METHOD OF NIME RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN THE PACIFIC

Since 1989 NIME has been conducting a series of research programs to clarify the state of distance higher education institutions in Asian and Pacific countries, financially supported by the Ministry of Education, Japan. For 1989 Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in Thailand and the Universitas Terbuka in Indonesia were selected as the research objects. For 1990, Indira Gandhi Open University in India and the Allama Iqbal Open University in

Pakistan were studied by the research team, and for 1991 USP Extension Services was selected. Each research project attempted to clarify the "real" state of each distance higher education institution. This research project will continue through 1993. For this year we have sent two research teams to Korea and Malaysia. For 1993 China will be studied as our last and largest research target. When we have completed this project, an overall image of distance higher education in Asia and the Pacific will be grasped by the output of the research.

The 1991 research had the following two research objectives:

1. To examine the real state, role and effect of the system of USP Extension Services and its regional centers, and how they function in relation to the geographical, socio-economic and cultural conditions of each island society in which the Extension Program operates. Especially, to determine how regional centers are concerned in the reciprocal process between internal and external factors of socio-economic development of island societies.
2. To see how the USP Extension Program affects regional development, especially the human resource development, of island societies. Focusing on both social and regional mobility of students/graduates of the distance education program, the role and function of distance education were examined in terms of human resource development in the respective island societies. In addition, this research tried to clarify the unique characteristics of human resources trained through USP distance education in comparison with those trained in metropolitan universities of the Pacific Rim countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii and the West Coast of the United States.

This study placed a great deal of emphasis on field interviews with students/graduates. Needless to say, to study each learners' behavior is one of the important factors in any project of educational research. However, many research programs on distance education conducted in the past tended to depend on data collected through the central administration of the distance education institution, not through visits and observations of the "realities" of the learners themselves. This tendency might be due to the difficulties and inconveniences of visiting remotely-located study centres. Especially in Asian and Pacific countries which include many developing areas, even visiting local facilities in isolated areas away from the Capital is quite difficult for a researcher in the field of education.

In view of the principle of educational research, however, it is nearly impossible to grasp the real state of distance education without field interviews. In this study, we tried to stick with this principal method of educational research in order to complement the weakness of some studies.

The responses obtained through these interviews were compared using different student/graduate categories. The six categories were:

1. Students learning at USP Suva Campus.
2. Island students learning through the Extension Program.

3. Islanders studying in metropolitan universities in the Pacific Rim.
4. Island residents who had completed the Extension Program.
5. Island residents graduated from USP Suva Campus.
6. Islanders remaining in the Pacific Rim countries after their graduation from metropolitan universities in these countries.

Interviews covered a wide range of subjects relating to their learning behavior and motivation, life style, life history, education and social mobility, social status and expectation, ethnic identity, and their motivation toward nation building. We selected approximately 150 samples of students/graduates from the main campus and each regional centre. In addition to these, we also selected about 50 samples of students/graduates from universities in metropolitan cities out of the South Pacific Region, such as Honolulu, San Francisco and Berkeley in the United States; Auckland, Palmerston North and Wellington in New Zealand, and Brisbane in Australia.

By adopting this research method, we could obtain significant and interesting findings on learners of higher education institutions in the Pacific Region.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND USP EDUCATION

First, we would like to discuss the relationship between human resource development and USP education. In our research it was found that USP Extension students/graduates were more motivated to work or study abroad than the island students/graduates of metropolitan universities in the rim countries.

For the Extension students the programs provided by the USP may function to provide a way to immigrate into the rim countries. It seems that, while attending the program they become inclined to move abroad seeking better economic opportunity. This fact was verified in another finding of our research as shown in Table 2 describing the degree of job satisfaction among six different categories of the interviewees. Of these categories, according to this table, the USP Extension graduates showed the greatest discontent with their present job and, likewise, the gap concerning job satisfaction before and after enrollment was also the greatest in this group. By enrolling in the Extension program the discontent seemed to be magnified further. This trend is even more facilitated when the economy of the country is weak and job opportunities are slim.

In addition, the Extension programs play an important role in providing not only job training but also the foundations needed for further education elsewhere. In such countries as Kiribati or Tuvalu the USP education functions to provide an opportunity for those having completed secondary level education and failed to receive a government scholarship to reapply for a university level education rather than providing further training for their jobs.

From these findings of our research it may be inferred that the more education islanders gain through the USP Extension programs, the more they become inclined to move

abroad. Ironically, however, when we conducted the same survey in the rim countries, we found very few students among the interviewees who had enrolled in the Extension program in the home island. This clearly indicates that in reality the number of those trained through the Extension program flowing out of their home islands is much fewer than inferred despite the great expectation expressed by many of the interviewees of this category.

From our findings it may be stated that the USP Extension Services contribute to island countries in that professional knowledge and skills necessary for social development in the respective country have apparently been accumulated, but, at the same time, leave the islanders educated and trained through the Extension programs frustrated because of scarce employment opportunities commensurate with their educational background. From this it may be further inferred that these necessary foundations for development and the frustrated islanders educated through the USP programs could generate potential social transformation in island societies.

EVALUATION OF THE USP AS A REGIONAL HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION: POSSIBLY CONTRIBUTING TO THE FORMATION OF A "PAN-PACIFIC" IDENTITY

Finally, we would like to evaluate the USP Extension Programs. In our field research in order to measure the effect of the Extension Program we asked questions to see how the USP Extension programs are socially evaluated in terms of job promotion and employment. Our preliminary results imply that students attending metropolitan universities least evaluated the program followed by those currently attending Suva Campus. From this it may be inferred that the formation of a mild social stratification may be taking place in the island societies, based upon the prestige among the metropolitan university graduates, USP Suva Campus graduates and those completing the Extension Programs.

This was evident in the interviews of islanders playing important roles in the international scene.

As for the USP Regional Centers, a unique part of the USP system, they are under strong influence from the socio-economic circumstances of the respective island country. Therefore, the facilities and services provided vary from one center to another. Table 4 shows how regional services vary in each of the member countries.

Of these Regional Centers, some have a large enrollments and excellent facilities and equipment as in Fiji, whereas countries such as Tokelau do not have even basic center facilities. Also in the utilization of communication satellite technology, it was found that there was a great gap among the member countries. Many of them are provided with free access to a satellite transponder by a local telecommunication company and capable of communicating via INTELSAT, while there are countries such as Nauru or Niue that have to substitute HB radios with inadequate capabilities, or Kiribati that has been refused free access to satellite by the local telecommunication company.

Concerning the ideal of educational use of communication satellites, we obtained positive evaluation in our research as shown in Table 5. This indicates that it is recognized throughout the region that satellite communication technology is vital to island education.

However, the evaluation of communication satellite by students participating in tutorials greatly varies from one country to another. In the second analysis of the evaluation research conducted by the USP Extension Services in 1991 the evaluation of the practical effect of communication satellite was relatively low as indicated in Table 6. However, the evaluation was relatively high in Fiji, The Solomon Islands and Western Samoa, while it was low in Nauru and Vanuatu. It should be noted that this gap in evaluation among islands is not due to mere technical aspects but largely due to socio-linguistic factors. This indicates a reality that the educational use of communication satellites is still immature on a practical level despite its plausible ideal.

Although the USP still has much difficulty in its systems, a great number of students and graduates of the USP programs mentioned that attending the program provided them with a self awareness and identity as a member of the Pacific community. They also mentioned that by attending and graduating from the USP Suva campus and participating in the satellite tutorial they had come to have a "we feeling". Especially among the graduates of the Suva campus a certain network was created and a common identity formed despite their varied socio-cultural backgrounds. This is not to say that the forming of this identity denies their indigenous identity with their home country. In view of today's identity theory this identity may be regarded as a "second" identity that emerges contingent upon various social settings.

Having this sort of identity may be significant in terms of further development and transformation of societies in the Pacific Basin. This common identity could include other people in the whole region, such as Micronesia, South East Asia or East Asia. Such an identity may be called a "Pan-Pacific" identity. Should this integrated identity actually be emerging in the Pacific Basin, it could possibly contribute to mutual understanding and harmonious development of the Pacific Basin.

DISCUSSION

The Pacific Basin is so vast and diversified that it is nearly impossible to attempt to grasp the whole region within a single framework. As discussed in the preceding section of this presentation, however, totally new and non-traditional higher educational systems have been emerging throughout the Pacific, which have been producing new types of leaders. Furthermore, with development of socio-cultural conditions in the respective societies, it seems that a sound human foundation is being created that could help establish a new socio-cultural network based upon mutual cooperation throughout the Pacific Basin. Such a foundation would be more realistic with technologies which would support and further forge the new human network.

Toward this goal our government has been pursuing a "human development network concept" which would link together Japan, the U.S., ASEAN, and South Pacific island countries. A network of human development centers has already been set up in Okinawa, Fiji, Hawai'i, etc., for establishing Pacific economic cooperation by creating a flexible technical transfer system in which one can choose a place for study in accordance with the technical level and content desired and needed by the home country.

The human development network structure will be the basis for the progress of individual projects anticipated hereafter. As such a project the National Institute of Multimedia Education has been promoting a study of establishing an international education network by using various innovative communication technologies. However, this study is still in an experimental stage and yet to be developed.

Now that we have these technological devices available, it would be up to us academicians and policy-makers to best utilize them for development of the whole Pacific Basin.

Table 1 Expectation for Immigration

Is there any country/city in which you want to work or study in the future?

	Yes	No	Total
1. Students at USP Suva Campus	6 24.0%	19 76.0%	25
2. Island students learning through the Extension Program	16 41.0%	23 59.0%	39
3. Island students in metropolitan universities in the Pacific Rim	9 25.7%	26 74.3%	35
4. Island residents completed the Extension Program	5 29.4%	12 70.6%	17
5. Island residents graduated from USP Suva Campus	8 53.3%	7 46.7%	15
6. Islanders remaining in the Pacific Rim countries	8 42.1%	11 57.9%	19
Combined categories	20 55.6%	16 44.4%	36
Total	72 38.7%	114 61.3%	186

Table 2 Job Satisfaction

Are you satisfied with your present job? Were you satisfied with the job that you had before you entered your University/USP Program?

	Yes, definitely	Yes, to some extent	Not quite	Definitely not	Total
1. Students at USP Suva Campus	3 42.9%	3 42.9%	1 14.3%	0 0.0%	7
2. Island students learning through the Extension Program	14 46.7%	10 33.3%	4 13.3%	2 6.7%	30
3. Island students in metropolitan universities in the Pacific Rim	8 61.5%	3 23.1%	2 15.4%	0 0.0%	13
4. Island residents completed the Extension Program	11 64.7%	3 17.6%	2 11.8%	1 5.9%	17
5. Island residents graduated from USP Suva Campus	5 35.7%	4 28.6%	4 28.6%	1 7.1%	14
6. Islanders remaining in the Pacific Rim countries	10 55.6%	4 22.2%	2 11.1%	2 11.1%	18
Combined categories	21 63.6%	11 33.3%	1 3.0%	0 0.0%	33
Total	72 54.5%	38 28.8%	16 12.1%	6	132

Table 3 Evaluation of USP Extension Programs

In general, do you think graduates from USP Extension Program are benefited from the aspect of obtaining a job or promoting to a better position?

	Yes, definitely	Yes, to some extent	Not quite	Definitely not	Total
1. Students at USP Suva Campus	12 52.2%	10 43.5%	1 4.3%	0 0.0%	23
2. Island students learning through the Extension Program	25 64.1%	12 30.8%	2 5.1%	0 0.0%	39
3. Island students in metropolitan universities in the Pacific Rim	15 50.0%	13 43.3%	2 6.7%	0 0.0%	30
4. Island residents completed the Extension Program	11 61.1%	5 27.8%	2 11.1%	0 0.0%	18
5. Island residents graduated from USP Suva Campus	9 60.0%	5 33.3%	1 6.7%	0 0.0%	15
6. Islanders remaining in the Pacific Rim countries	12 75.0%	3 18.8%	0 0.0%	1 6.3%	16
Combined categories	24 68.6%	9 25.7%	1 2.9%	1 2.9%	35
Total	108 61.4%	57 32.4%	9 5.1%	2 1.1%	176

Table 4 Conditions of Regional Centers

Country	Regional Center	Independent	Facility	Participation in USPNET	Access to INTELSAT
Cook Islands	x		x	x	x
Fiji	x		x	x	x
Kiribati	x		x	Disconnected in 1988	-
Nauru	x		-	x	HB radio
Niue	x		-	x	HB radio
Solomon Islands	x		x	x	x
Tokelau	-		-	x	x
Tonga	x		x	x	x
Tuvalu	x		-	x	HB radio
Vanuatu	x		-	x	x
Western Samoa	x		-	x	HB radio

Table 5 Evaluation on the Satellite Tutorials

Do you think satellite-used tutorial is effective for the advancement of learning activities in Pacific island countries?

	Yes, definitely	Yes, to some extent	Not quite	Definitely not	Total
Fiji	12 41.4%	15 51.7%	2 6.9%	0 0.0%	29
Polynesia	32 60.4%	13 24.5%	7 13.2%	1 1.9%	53
Micronesia	10 58.8%	3 17.6%	4 23.5%	0 0.0%	17
Melanesia	13 61.9%	6 48.6%	2 9.5%	0 0.0%	21
The Pacific Rim Countries	22 73.3%	6 20.0%	2 6.7%	0 0.0%	30
Total	89 59.3%	43 28.7%	17 11.3%	1 0.7%	150

Table 6 Evaluation of Satellite Tutorials

How helpful were any satellite tutorials you attended?

	Cook Is.	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Nauru	Solomon Is.	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	W. Samoa	Total
Very helpful	1 3.7%	39 22.4%	2 20.0%	0	0 0.0%	8 13.1%	0 0.0%	2 14.3%	0 0.0%	2 16.7%	54
Of some help	0 0.0%	12 6.9%	3 30.0%	0	0 0.0%	6 9.8%	0 0.0%	1 7.1%	0 0.0%	3 25.0%	25
Of hardly any help	0 0.0%	3 1.7%	1 10.0%	0	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 16.7%	1 7.1%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	6
Did not attend any	26 96.3%	120 69.0%	4 40.0%	0	5 100.0%	47 77.1%	5 83.3%	10 71.4%	14 100.0%	7 58.3%	238
Total	27	174	10	0	5	61	6	14	14	12	323